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OHIO TRAIL USERS

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Abstract.—Hikers, horseback riders, bicycle riders, and motorcycle riders were interviewed on randomly selected trails in Ohio to better understand who they are and why they use trails. Bicycle riders were found to be the most active trail users; bicycle and motorcycle riders were younger than hikers and horseback riders. The majority of hikers and horseback riders preferred single-use trails. People used trails for the enjoyment of nature.

Keywords: Recreation, trails, hiking, horseback riding, bicycle riding, motorcycle riding.

There is something about traveling along a forest trail that most people find relaxing. Maybe that is one reason why more people are visiting the woods—some for a few minutes and others for several weeks. The concern of land managers about understanding and satisfying this growing urge prompted me to survey Ohio trail users. The findings presented here will help trail planners, builders, and managers gain a better understanding of who trail users are and why they use trails.

Data for the study were collected by a single interviewer on randomly selected trails all over Ohio. All trail users 10 years of age or older who traveled past the interviewer from June 1, 1974, to November 1, 1974 were interviewed. A detailed description of the study method is in a report on the compatibility of trail users in Ohio (McCay and Moeller 1976).

Each respondent was asked how he preferred to travel on trails. Four categories of travel were

listed: hiking, horseback, bicycle, and motorcycle. When more than one trail use was checked, we assumed an equal preference for those checked.

<i>Expressed trail use preference</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Hiking	252
Horseback riding	110
Bicycle riding	108
Motorcycle riding	29

Results

The enjoyment one derives from using a trail depends on many factors. One is the people he travels with. Few trail users travel alone; some travel only with their families. The majority of horseback riders and bicycle riders interviewed traveled with friends in groups that averaged nine and three people, respectively.

<i>Trail companions</i>	<i>Hikers</i>	<i>Horseback riders</i>	<i>Bicycle riders</i>	<i>Motorcycle riders</i>
 (percent)			
None	10	6	18	10
Friends	45	73	58	45
Family	<u>45</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>45</u>
	100	100	100	100

The majority of hikers and horseback riders preferred single-use trails. Most bicycle and motorcycle riders preferred trails that are intended for more than one type of trail user.

<i>Trail uses (no.)</i>	<i>Hikers</i>	<i>Horseback riders</i>	<i>Bicycle riders</i>	<i>Motorcycle riders</i>
 (percent)			
One	69	54	36	17
Two	22	25	47	31
Three	8	18	14	42
Four	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>10</u>
	100	100	100	100

Frequency of participation indicates the interest an individual or group has in using a trail. Bicycle riders were the most active trail users.

<i>Use per year (days)</i>	<i>Hikers</i>	<i>Horseback riders</i>	<i>Bicycle riders</i>	<i>Motorcycle riders</i>
 (percent)			
Less than 10	70	38	40	48
10 - 49	20	32	21	31
50 - 99	5	15	12	4
100 or more	<u>5</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>17</u>
	100	100	100	100

Four-fifths of the bicycle and motorcycle riders were under 30 years of age. Hikers and horseback riders were represented in all age classes.

<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Hikers</i>	<i>Horseback riders</i>	<i>Bicycle riders</i>	<i>Motorcycle riders</i>
 (percent)			
17 or less	21	35	60	35
18 - 29	35	23	22	44
30 - 49	27	30	12	18
50 or more	<u>17</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100	100

Disagreement between trail users and land managers over what type of users should use the trails may cause problems. My results indicate that hikers, more than any other group, agreed with managers.

<i>Agree with managers</i>	<i>Hikers</i>	<i>Horseback riders</i>	<i>Bicycle riders</i>	<i>Motorcycle riders</i>
 (percent)			
Yes	74	46	64	51
No	<u>26</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>49</u>
	100	100	100	100

Most of the trail users interviewed did not belong to a trail club. Horseback riders had the largest percentage of membership, but less than two-fifths of them were members of a trail club.

<i>Trail club membership</i>	<i>Hikers</i>	<i>Horseback riders</i>	<i>Bicycle riders</i>	<i>Motorcycle riders</i>
 (percent)			
Yes	10	36	13	21
No	<u>90</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>79</u>
	100	100	100	100

The more that trail planners, builders, and managers know about why people use trails, the more effectively they can satisfy the desires of trail users. The reasons that people gave for being on the trail did not differ significantly among the four types of trail users. The responses can be summarized by saying that people used trails for the enjoyment of nature. One fourth of the respondents were "just looking at the scenery". "Pleasure and enjoyment" was the reason given by another one-eighth of the people interviewed. Other notable reasons given were that trails were "convenient or close to home"; that users were "exploring or trying to learn more about nature"; the trail "was well signed"; and "the people we are with wanted to go on it".

Conclusions

The following findings about trail users in Ohio can be recommended for use by trail developers.

- Horseback riders travel in larger groups than other types of trail users.

- Hikers and horseback riders prefer single-use trails.
- Bicycle riders are the most active participants.
- Bicycle and motorcycle riders are younger than hikers and horseback riders.
- Hikers are more in agreement with managers concerning what type of users should use the trails.
- Most trail users do not belong to trail clubs.
- The main reason why people use trails is for the enjoyment of nature.

These findings, combined with other information on the requirements of trail users, terrain, and land-management objectives, will help planners and managers provide trails that are more meaningful to the people who use them.

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